

Cultural Behavior of Small Traders in Business Activities at Vietnamese Traditional Markets: A Case in Ho Chi Minh City



Huynh Ngoc Trang

University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: Traditional markets have long been considered people's favorite shopping places, associated with many unique and impressive cultural beauties of each region and locality. Currently, many new business forms have appeared, such as shopping centers, supermarkets, and convenience stores, but traditional markets are considered to still be a popular form of commerce. For traditional markets to promote and affirm their role and position in socio-economic development, all levels, sectors, and small traders doing business at the market have implemented many solutions to promote the behavioral culture of small businesses trade in business activities at traditional markets in Ho Chi Minh City to meet current integration requirements. The article studies the general perspective on the behavioral culture of small traders in business activities at traditional markets in Ho Chi Minh City.

KEYWORDS: Behavioral culture, traditional market, Ho Chi Minh City

INTRODUCTION

Communication exists in every aspect of human life, from economic, political, and social activities to religious beliefs. Whether it's a simple or complex interaction, communication plays a crucial role in human relationships. Throughout history, even though communication activities were limited to village gatherings or within the family, the Vietnamese people have always held a deep respect for greetings because "Greetings are higher than feasts" and "Words cost nothing to buy, choose words to please each other". Today, with the development of society and the process of international economic integration, competition is becoming increasingly fierce and ruthless. In this context, etiquette is seen as a critical criterion that determines success or failure in the business environment.

One of the distinctive business models in Vietnam, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, is the market model. Here, buying and selling activities take place, and interpersonal relationships in trade constitute a significant part of every individual's life. This relationship has brought many benefits to both buyers and sellers. Buyers can satisfy their needs for goods, while sellers can fulfill their desire to sell products, which, once satisfied, yield profits for the seller and, on a larger scale, for producers as well. Through this buying and selling relationship, many issues arise, among which the most important is the culture of interaction between humans and between humans and nature. Except for employees in supermarkets or shopping centers who receive proper training in sales techniques and customer service, most sellers, both wholesale and retail, do not hone their skills in customer interaction. They often communicate with customers in an unstructured manner. Consequently, sometimes small business owners can easily lose loyal customers just because of a single word or action. Even though customers bring them profits, some sellers may appear to be doing a favor for the customer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many works and research written about the market, but most of the authors describe the geographical location, give an overview of the types of business, purchase, and sale, the operating time of the markets, etc. The author has not described specifically and analyzed in detail the people involved in business activities as well as their role in this business.

The writings about the market appeared very early, specifically in 2004 in the work "Nam Bo Dat and People" author Tran Nam Tien presented outstanding and memorable features of the floating market in Can Tho in the section. Floating Market - the cultural beauty of rivers and canals in Can Tho; Following that in 2006, the work "The Ancient Signs of the South" by author Hong Hanh overviewed and compared the types of markets in the past and present markets in the section Old and present markets.

In 2009, in the work "Floating Market in the Mekong Delta", author Nham Hung affirmed that the market assumes the role of an intermediary between producers and consumers. "Talking about markets is talking about commodity economics, talking about a popular form of trade in the world. From simple places of exchange and sale of products from ancient times to supermarkets that organize the supply of goods with a modern technological chain to meet all the diverse needs of people in today's society. now;

Cultural Behavior of Small Traders in Business Activities at Vietnamese Traditional Markets: A Case in Ho Chi Minh City

from village markets in rural areas, upland markets, in mountainous ethnic areas to alley markets, wholesale markets, central markets in urban areas, etc., all have such common characteristics". Also talking about the floating market model, in 2011, two authors Nguyen Trong Nhan and Dao Ngoc Canh did research on Cai Rang Floating Market in tourism development. Cai Rang Floating Market is one of the famous tourist attractions in Can Tho city in particular and the Mekong Delta in general because of its inherent attractive factors. Tourism activities have been established and developed here for a long time and bring many benefits. However, there are still many consequences that after all are caused by the local people, the tourism business sectors, tourists, and the tourism industry of Can Tho city, etc., who have not been cared for and protected. , invest and renovate it properly. With primary and secondary data, the article presents the potential and current status of tourism development; weaknesses, strengths, opportunities, and threats; and solutions to overcome difficulties and problems in developing Cai Rang floating market tourism.

Two authors Nguyen Thi Phuong Dung and Bui Thi Kim Thanh conducted the article "Comparison of consumers' shopping choice behavior towards supermarkets and traditional markets: The case of the consumer goods industry in Ho Chi Minh City". Can Tho City" in 2011. The study was carried out to compare the shopping behavior of supermarkets and traditional markets of the consumer goods industry in Can Tho City. According to the research results, customers who go to supermarkets are affected by: products are delivered to their places, fixed prices, and travel costs because they are far from home; The target customers of the traditional market are affected by: Products are made on the spot, bought in short, prices are negotiable. However, traditional markets still have disadvantages in terms of market hygiene, quality of goods of unknown origin, flexible prices, incorrect weighing, freezing, measuring and counting, etc. Therefore, the study also proposes Some solutions to improve the operational efficiency of two types of supermarkets and traditional markets.

Nguyen Thi Thoa, in 2011, in the work "Markets in the Life of the Vietnamese People", described clearly and in detail the types and methods of the Southern market, especially in chapter 4, the author refers to the change in needs of sellers and buyers due to the influence of the urbanization process. This is a useful argument for developing the research direction in the thesis.

In 2015, author Tran Nhat Vy summarized the history of the formation and geographical location of markets in Ho Chi Minh City in the work "From Ben Nghe to Saigon". Specifically, in the section "Something about the old market in Saigon" from page 251 to page 311, the author also described the history of formation, geographical location, and business characteristics of the old markets from the inner city to the suburbs of Saigon.

In 2014, with the master's thesis in Ethnology "Night Market in Luang Prabang" (Lao People's Democratic Republic), author Pham Thi Mui described the characteristics of the Ton Kham market and placed the market in a comparative relationship. Compare with ethnic markets in Southeast Asia. Besides, the author analyzes the interaction between sellers local tourists, and foreign tourists in the social space of Ton Kham market to contribute to clarifying the positive and negative impacts of the market. Tourism to local people's lives and self-governing market management are suggestions to provide lessons for Vietnam.

Several university graduation theses and master's theses have also been written about the market and market cultural changes: 2013 university graduation thesis "The cultural change of Moc market - Cao Thuong town, Tan district Yen - Bac Giang province in the socialist-oriented market economic mechanism" by Nguyen Thi Ly learned about the cultural values of rural markets in general and Moc market in particular. In addition, we also learn about the existence of the traditional market interacting with the modern era at Moc market - Cao Thuong town - Tan Yen district - Bac Giang province. On that basis, provide comments and assessments on the development trend of local trade exchanges in the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

Approach theories

Functional theory: According to this theory, any culture can be studied in terms of performing its different functions. Although functional theory is approached from different perspectives of scientists, the thesis mainly applies the approach to the psychological function of B. Malinowski and the structural function of A. Radcliffe Brown.

According to Radcliffe-Brown, the functional analysis of a social phenomenon is to find out how it contributes to the maintenance of social cohesion. The function of a particular social practice is its contribution to the whole of social life as the functioning of the whole social system. For Malinowski, the process of customs is to satisfy the primary physiological needs of the individual through cultural means (Robert Layton, 2007, p. 51 – 52).

In general, the functional theory of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown is based on the basic idea that any stable system is made up of many parts. Each part has a different functional role. The parts do not exist independently but are organically related to together create a stable system. To understand the function of a system, it is necessary to consider the contribution of the components to the stable operation of the system. Applying this theory, the researcher will identify and explain the relationships in business activities in traditional markets.

Structural theory: Like functional theory, many researchers have developed structural theory to explain many cultural phenomena, including Radcliffe Brown. In the thesis, we apply the structural theory of Claude Levi-Strauss. According to Levi-Strauss, culture

Cultural Behavior of Small Traders in Business Activities at Vietnamese Traditional Markets: A Case in Ho Chi Minh City

is determined by some pre-programmed code in the dominant brain. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on studying the intellectual/mental structure underlying social behaviors. It's really about understanding the underlying structures that govern behavior on the surface. Latent structures take the form of pairs of opposites. These pairs of opposing categories will govern and determine human actions. Applying structural theory in the thesis, we want to explain what "deep structure" has influenced to creation of the typical "behaviors" of small businesses.

Cultural Materialism: The representative of thisism is Marvin Harris. The content emphasizes the material conditions that determine human thinking and behavior. Research should be based on empirical data rather than etic interpretations. This theory is based on two assumptions. First, all components of society are closely related. A change in any part will create a corresponding change in the other components. The second and core assumption of this school is that the environment plays a decisive role in the formation of culture. All cultures, from the perspective of this school, are divided into three components: Social infrastructure (biological needs, resources..); Social middle class (government organization, production organization..); and Social upper layer (religion, politics, art...). The content of social infrastructure affects the middle and upper social strata. Any change in the social infrastructure leads to changes in the middle and upper layers. With this theory, the topic explores and explains the cultural change of small traders under the influence of factors such as economy, society, religion, etc., which are affecting their lives day by day.

Specific methods

Methods of collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing documents: Works (books, theses, scientific reports, journals...) of domestic and foreign researchers on behavioral culture and business culture, about business characteristics of traditional markets in Vietnam in general and HCMC in particular. In addition, the information collected from reports and statistics of sources such as the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Market Management Board...

Based on available documents and materials, this method will arrange, classify, and generalize the knowledge about the research field to draw scientific judgments about the cultural expression and behavior of small businesses. From there, learn the relationship of these factors in the whole cultural life of small businesses.

Methods in ethnographic fieldwork are important methods for effective and reliable research, research, and data collection. When doing fieldwork, we pay attention to the use of specific operations:

Interviews: Through prepared intentional (and non-intentional) conversations, we will conduct interviews with small traders, consumers, and market management... in various forms to collect factual information on issues of interest.

Comparative method: This method will be applied during the implementation of the thesis, including chronological comparison and synchronous comparison.

Historical comparison is used to compare the economic, social, and cultural life of small traders in the present period with those in the tradition before there were cultural and social changes that changed all aspects.

Synchronous comparison to compare and contrast the characteristics and extent of influence of economic integration on the personality of small traders in different markets in Ho Chi Minh City.

This method has an important position in analyzing the materials collected during the fieldwork to identify cultural values according to the objectives of the proposed topic.

In addition, we will also apply several other research methods such as the interdisciplinary method, system analysis method, etc. during the implementation of the thesis. In short, depending on the actual situation, we will apply the method with different levels and ways to bring about the effectiveness of the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some Concepts

Up to now, there are approximately more than 300 definitions of culture worldwide. However, we have chosen psychological and origin-based definitions as the research orientation of the thesis.

Psychological definitions emphasize the process of adaptation to the environment, the process of learning, the formation of habits, and human behavior. One such definition by William Graham Sumner (1840 - 1910), an American scholar, and professor at Yale University, and Albert Galloway Keller, his student and collaborator, states: "The totality of human adaptation to their living conditions is culture, or civilization... These adaptations are ensured by combining techniques such as modification, selection, and transmission through inheritance".

Origin-based definitions define culture from its source. An example is the definition by Pitirim Alexandrovich Sorokin (1889 - 1968), an American sociologist of Russian origin, and founder of the Sociology Department at Harvard University: "In the broadest sense, culture is the totality of what is created or modified by conscious or unconscious activities of two or more individuals interacting with each other and affecting their behavior".

Behavioral culture, in essence, represents stable, sustainable, and spiritually valuable communication standards encountered, and exchanged through spoken or written language in personal, collective, social community, and human relationships.

Cultural Behavior of Small Traders in Business Activities at Vietnamese Traditional Markets: A Case in Ho Chi Minh City

In the view of scholar Nguyen Viet Chuc, the content of the concept of behavioral culture includes the way of relating, attitudes, and actions of people towards the natural environment, society, and others. We can understand behavioral culture as having three dimensions of relationships: with nature, society, and oneself. Behavioral culture is closely linked to the social standards that society uses for behavior, which are social norms.

Business culture. Author Duong Thi Lieu, in the textbook "Business Culture," defines business culture as follows:

In the broad sense, "business culture is the entirety of material and spiritual values created and accumulated by business entities through their business activities, in interaction between business entities and the business environment."

In the narrow sense, "business culture is a system of values, standards, beliefs, and behaviors created by business entities in the process of doing business, expressed in how they interact with society, nature, in a community, or a region."

Behavioral culture in business. In the textbook "Business Culture" by Duong Thi Lieu, behavioral culture is considered one of the factors contributing to building the image of a business, establishing a corporate culture with its own identity.

Traditional markets. According to the Encyclopedia of Vietnam, Volume 1 (1995, p. 486), "A market is a meeting place between the supply and demand of goods, services, and capital; it is where the buying and selling of goods take place between producers, traders, and consumers".

According to Decree No. 02/2003/ND-CP of January 14, 2003, of the Government on the development and management of markets, "A market is a form of commercial business developed and developed traditionally, organized at a location following the planning, meeting the needs of buying, selling, and exchanging goods and services, and the consumption needs of the local population."

According to author Ngô Anh Tuấn, "Traditional markets are a concept used to refer to a type of business developed based on traditional commercial activities, organized at a location according to planning, meeting the needs of buying, selling, exchanging goods and services, and consumption needs of the local population."

Lewis Mumford considered markets as a "genius invention" of human society.

Market traders. Traders are small-scale merchants according to the Vietnamese Dictionary by Hoang Phe. From this definition, we can generalize that market traders are those who engage in small-scale trade and business activities in market areas.

Overview of the behavioral culture of small traders in business activities at traditional markets in Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City, through more than 300 years of formation and transformation, has always affirmed its role as the most dynamic commercial and cultural center of the country. With a favorable location for transportation links both by waterway and road, trading activities, buying and selling of goods from past to present have always been bustling and vibrant. Market architecture, therefore, is developed with many diverse scales and forms that change in different periods. Originating from empty land "docks" along rivers and canals, temporary tents/tarpaulins, to a series of solid market buildings widely distributed throughout the city associated with river elements, and typical market streets, Trading activities extend to the surrounding area as much as possible. The market not only occupies an important position in economic development but it also preserves the spiritual and cultural values of the area's people. Market architecture not only serves the needs of trade but also shows the unique cultural imprint and features of a place.

In the current period, under the influence of many factors, the Market space is gradually losing its position. The unkempt, degraded, and even disappearing conditions of markets are quite common in addition to the desolate and less bustling scene in some markets that were very busy in the past. The birth of supermarkets, shopping centers, retail groups, convenience stores, etc., providing convenient shopping services, guaranteed stock, and quality of goods, uptime, Flexible opening (even 24/7), and good customer service... have gradually created attraction and prevailed over the market. In addition, the pressure to upgrade and expand urban areas in existing old urban areas with a series of infrastructure projects, housing development, complex works, etc. in the context of limited land funds has been and is continuing. Threats to the market and market space: Being relocated, cleared, encroached, disputed, suffocated... causing imbalance and negative impact on urban space and aesthetics.

The behavioral culture of small traders in business activities at traditional markets in Ho Chi Minh City always emphasizes the word "trust" in business. It can be considered an unwritten law of the Chinese people. Both the seller and the buyer adhere to their credibility. Economic relations associated with the word "trust" are also a potential for economic development in Ho Chi Minh City and the South. This is the cultural strength of Ho Chi Minh City that helps them unite and cooperate for economic development. Ho Chi Minh City small businesses always establish a network of relationships between individuals and organizations and consider it a key activity in their business strategy. It can be relationships with suppliers, public agencies, customers, and even competitors. In any relationship, people in Ho Chi Minh City always maintain trust and value personal dignity and reputation. In particular, Chinese people in Ho Chi Minh City set up their association headquarters - a place of cultural activities in District 5. A common characteristic is that the majority of Chinese business owners often hold dignitaries on the association's board of directors. The restaurant belongs to the language branch of which they are a member. This not only shows their prestige but also brings prestige and advantages in business, and is also the basis for creating links and relationships. business

Cultural Behavior of Small Traders in Business Activities at Vietnamese Traditional Markets: A Case in Ho Chi Minh City

relationships. Small businesses in Ho Chi Minh City always join hands to help new young businesses appear. The network of small businesses in Ho Chi Minh City can operate as quickly and efficiently as any bank. Thanks to that, a reputable business can raise capital for its new project simply and quickly.

More importantly, between Chinese and Vietnamese small businesses there are also similarities in customs and traditions (both have their roots in Eastern culture, from traditional Confucian ideology), which easily create community solidarity in the process of building the country. During their long-term living in Vietnam, in addition to taking care of their living, the Chinese people participated in social activities with the Vietnamese and other ethnic groups. Cultural exchanges between the Chinese and other ethnic groups have taken place. Many marriages between Chinese and Vietnamese, Cham, and Khmer people also took place. Over time, life in the new homeland stabilized and developed gradually. From the difficulties and unfamiliarity of nature and customs of the new land, generations integrated, and the whole community transformed according to the movements of life from feudal and colonial times, through the resistance war against the French, the Americans, and in today's innovation process (Pham Tan Thien, 2023).

In addition, for many small traders in traditional markets, "commercial civilization" seems to be a new concept. Therefore, the district in Ho Chi Minh City has issued a set of criteria and procedures for evaluating and recognizing civilized commercial markets in the area. To meet these criteria, the team of small traders at Tu Duc Markets (Thu Duc City); Dan Sinh Market, Thai Binh Market (District 1), Ban Co Market (District 1), Phan Van Tri Market (Binh Thanh District), Binh Tay market (district 6), Hiep Thanh market, Ba Bau market, An Suong market (district 12), Rach Ong market, Pham The Hien market (district 8), Quarter 2 market (Binh Tan district)... has mobilized many capital sources to improve the market infrastructure. Many models such as "Clean counters, beautiful markets", "Civilized commercial sales points", and "Sales at the right price"... have been deployed by small traders and market management boards, the Women's Union and Small businesses need to change the way they sell, helping to attract more consumers to the market.

CONCLUSION

As Vietnamese citizens, when each of us is mentioned "market", we will immediately think of the business environment of buying, selling, and exchanging goods. It can be said that this is one of the first environments where people carry out business communication activities, a place for people to clearly express cultural behavioral traits in their trading relationships. However, the image of this business environment seems to be increasingly blurred, especially with the massive appearance of supermarkets and large shopping centers. The stagnant business situation in most markets across Vietnam in general and in the Ho Chi Minh City area, in particular, has given us a lot to think about: in the future, the model Will the market business continue to exist or will it give way to large commercial centers? Why did the market lose its position in business? How can we effectively maintain the market business model? To answer these questions, we have given many explanations. However, one of the explanations that we are most interested in is behavioral culture. This can be said to be an important factor contributing to business success. From the above concerns, we decided to choose the topic "Culture of behavior in the business environment at markets in Ho Chi Minh City" to research from the perspective of cultural studies throughout the research process. born.

Cultural behavior exists and takes place throughout human life. Cultural behavior is expressed not only through words but also through actions, gestures, and attitudes. In the business environment at markets, cultural behavior is expressed through: first, the way to handle product processing, product preservation, and behavior toward products that have passed their expiration date; The second is the behavior between small traders and consumers, between small traders and business partners, between small traders and the market management board. Regarding research space, we plan to choose Ben Thanh market, Ba Chieu market, and Binh Tay market as research locations. These three markets are considered the most diverse and diverse places to trade and sell products in Ho Chi Minh City. With our efforts to survey, learn, and research along with our inherent knowledge, we hope to be able to contribute a small part to the process of building cultural beauty for the next generations, especially differences in communication and behavior, how to become a civilized and polite person in a developed society like today.

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Cultural Behavior of Small Traders in Business Activities at Vietnamese Traditional Markets: A Case in Ho Chi Minh City

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